The Impact of Race and Criminal History on Hiring Decisions
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Abstract
The purpose of the current study was to determine the extent to which hiring decisions were influenced by an applicant’s criminal history and/or race. Research has shown that minorities are often at an economic disadvantage and are underrepresented in the workforce (Cox, 2010). The presence of a history that includes incarceration greatly diminishes the already slim chances for economic advancement. Our study aimed to better understand the extent to which each of these factors, criminal history and race, affected the likelihood of a candidate being hired for a managerial position.

Background & Rationale
- Pager (2003) showed direct evidence of a causal relationship between a criminal record and the likelihood of getting a callback after an initial job interview.
- Swanson, Langfield-Resee, and Bond (2012) found that 44% of employers surveyed had no formal written policy for hiring ex-offenders, leaving all discretion to the hiring manager.
- Despite taking advantage ofSkill development and educational opportunities, ex-offenders remain the most unemployable demographic (Pager, Western, & Suguio, 2009).
- Cox (2010) found that minorities are underrepresented in the workforce and are disproportionately affected by the presence of a criminal record regardless of the crime that was committed.

Hypotheses
We expected criminal history to significantly affect the hiring decision. Specifically, we expected those with a felony conviction in the last five years to be viewed less favorably than applicants without a felony conviction.
We also expected the applicant’s race to have an impact on the hiring decision with minority applicants being rated less favorably on the survey items.

Method
Participants:
We had a total of 182 participants (122 women, 57 men, 3 unspecified). All participants were undergraduate students at the College of Coastal Georgia.

Materials:
Two scenarios were developed for this study. Each scenario described a job applicant who was well-qualified for a managerial position. The only variations between the two scenarios were the applicant’s race (White, African-American, or Hispanic) and criminal history (felony conviction in the last five years, no criminal history). Each participant read only one scenario followed by several survey items developed specifically for this study. The survey items were Likert-type items on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) inquiring about the candidate’s level of trustworthiness, dependability, responsibility, and performance potential. The survey items were based on personal attributes that previous research indicated were negatively correlated with criminal history (Derosa and Ryan, 2012). We also asked for demographic items such as age, gender, ethnicity, major, class level, previous history of incarceration (self and/or immediate family members), and level of experience making hiring decisions.

Procedure:
Upon arrival to the classroom, participants were given a brief overview of the study and invited to participate. Those who volunteered, were given an informed consent form. Once the informed consent forms were read, signed, and received, each participant was given a packet. Participants were asked to imagine they were in charge of hiring someone for a managerial position, and they read a scenario about a job applicant. The scenario was followed by a survey regarding the applicant’s potential success in the job and various personality characteristics. Once all of the packets were completed, the participants were debriefed and given the researchers' contact information for any questions, comments, or concerns they may have following completion of the study.

Design: 2 x 3 design
Independent Variables included:
- Criminal History
- Felony conviction in the last five years, No Criminal History
- Race
- White, African-American, Hispanic

Results
One-way ANOVA tests revealed that participants viewed Hispanic applicants significantly more favorably than White applicants on most of the survey items. Participants also rated Hispanic applicants significantly more favorably than both White and African-American applicants on Dependability.

Discussion
This study demonstrated that in a theoretical hiring situation applicants with no criminal history were viewed more favorably than applicants with a criminal history. This finding is in line with previous research showing that job applicants with a criminal history are at a disadvantage in the job market and are less likely to be hired.
In contrast to previous research with regard to race, Hispanic and African-American applicants were viewed more favorably than White applicants on nearly all of our measures of positive traits and potential success on the job. Although these results are not supportive of our hypothesis regarding race, they are encouraging. Perhaps the negative stereotypes about the work performance of minority members are fading.
It is possible that our results are due to demand characteristics. The design of our study was fairly transparent and our participants may have made an extra effort not to appear racist by inflating their positive responses related to minority applicants. Further research is needed to fully explore the impact of race and criminal history on hiring decisions.

References

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